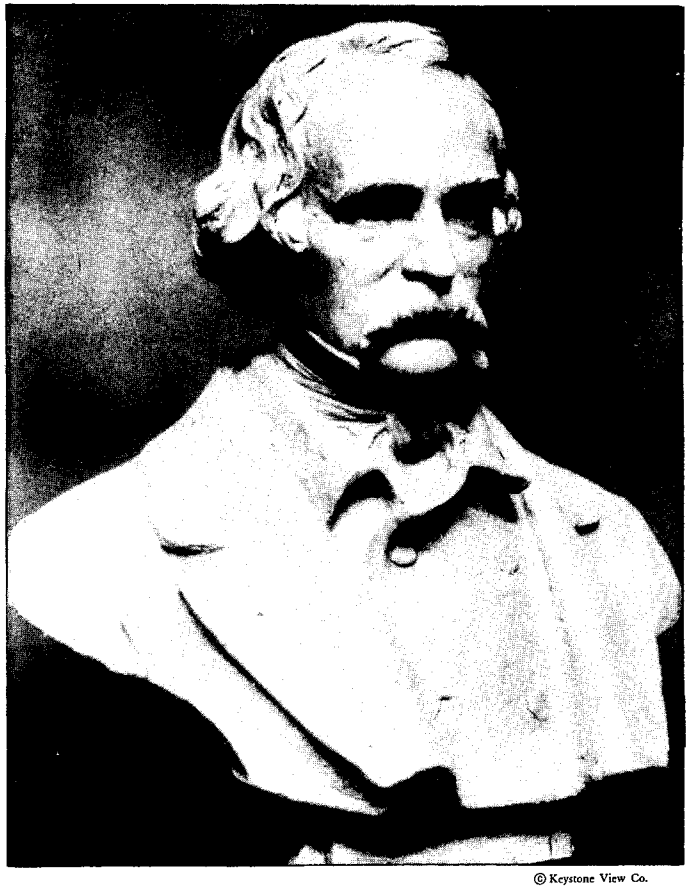
THE GREAT STONE FACE



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NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Bust by Daniel Chester French

Placed in The Hall of Fame, May 9, 1929

THE GREAT STONE FACE

By

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

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NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE
(1804—1864)

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, with the exception of Poe, ranks as the greatest American short-story writer. He was born in Salem, Massachusetts, in the ancestral home founded by William Hawthorne, who came from England to the New England Colony with John Winthrop in 1630. He graduated from Bowdoin College in 1825, a classmate of Longfellow. He was of a retiring disposition, abnormally shy and sensitive.

After leaving college he spent the following twelve years in Salem. Hawthorne had already determined to lead a literary life, and spent his time in writing a series of short stories and the novel, *Fanshawe*. In 1837 he won his first success as a writer, when the first series of *Twice-Told Tales* was published. But he received small remuneration from his first book, and was forced to accept a position in the customhouse at Boston. At the end of two years he lost this position by change of administration, and lived for a

time at Brook Farm with the Transcendentalists. From Brook Farm he moved to Concord, married, and settled down at the "Old Manse." Here he wrote the second series of *Twice-Told Tales*, and *Mosses from an Old Manse*.

After four years at Concord, Hawthorne moved to Salem, and became surveyor of customs. During the years at Salem he wrote *The Scarlet Letter*, probably the most vital piece of fiction written by an American. Henry James says: "*The Scarlet Letter* is the finest piece of imaginative writing yet put forth in this country."

Hawthorne had, at last, found himself as a writer. *The Scarlet Letter* was followed a year later by *The House of Seven Gables*, and then, shortly afterward, *The Wonder Book*, *Grandfather's Chair*, *The Snow Image*, *The Blithedale Romance*, and *Tanglewood Tales*.

While at work on his novels he found time to write a biography of Franklin Pierce, then candidate for President. After election, Pierce appointed him consul at Liverpool, where Hawthorne remained for four years. He traveled for two years on the Continent and returned to this country in 1860, broken in health, with unsettled mind, unable to write. He failed rapidly in health, and died in 1864.

In his writing Hawthorne interpreted old New England life, in which all his interests centered. His novels possess an individual charm and skill found in few writers of his time. We have said that Hawthorne loved seclusion, and yet he came in contact with

life through his various fields of activity, and through travel. His notebooks show his interest in people in the entries they contain of observations of character, and new ideas for stories. Hawthorne was an artist in the use of words to paint pictures. Most of his stories are built around a great truth. *The Great Stone Face* is of this type. As a piece of pure diction it is worthy of notice; the portrayal of character is wonderfully conceived; and the advance to the climax is gripping.

This story has been called the finest piece of allegory ever written. That natural phenomenon, the stone face of Profile Mountain, New Hampshire, appealed to Hawthorne's imagination. The author represents the boy Ernest as awaiting the fulfillment of the prophecy that a great man should come who would resemble the stone face. The people look for him in "Gathergold," then in "Old Blood-and-Thunder," and in "Old Stony Phiz"; but at last they recognize him in Ernest himself.

The story has four periods; it carries the boy Ernest through boyhood, young manhood, middle age, and old age. In each period the author shows the false ideal that is likely to mislead—wealth (Gathergold), military glory (Old Blood-and-Thunder), eloquence (Old Stony Phiz), and genius (The Poet). But into the story he weaves the highest ideal—character, which grows to completeness as the life of Ernest continues and he becomes preacher and seer. He endows Ernest with a fixed purpose, a goal,

and he carries him on through life until people see in the old man Ernest a resemblance to "The Great Stone Face."

The characters are real people of certain types. Someone has said that *The Great Stone Face,* as embodied in Ernest, finds its real pattern in Ralph Waldo Emerson, while Andrew Jackson was the real "Old Blood-and-Thunder," and Daniel Webster, "Old Stony Phiz." The great lesson of the story is the value of an ideal and a standard of life. It is interesting to follow the growth of Ernest from youth to the fine old man with the gleam of intelligence in his eyes, his quiet simple ways, without pretense, meeting each man as if he were receiving more than he could bestow.

It is interesting to read what Hawthorne has to say about Emerson in *The Old Manse:*

It was good to meet him in the wood-paths, or sometimes in our avenue, with that pure intellectual gleam diffused about his presence like the garment of a shining one; and he is so quiet, so simple, so without pretension, encountering each man alike as if expecting to receive more than he could impart. But it was impossible to dwell in his vicinity without inhaling, more or less, the mountain atmosphere of his lofty thought which, in the brains of some people, wrought a singular giddiness—new truth being as heady as new wine.

After reading this and similar pages in Hawthorne's works, the identity of Ralph Waldo Emerson with Ernest can hardly be doubted.

The reading of English classics such as this written in shorthand is not only interesting but very valuable for a number of reasons. Most important for us, of course, is the shorthand benefit to be gained. The reading of well-written shorthand is perhaps the nearest approach one can find to a royal road to shorthand skill. Obviously we cannot write good shorthand unless we have a mental picture of good shorthand. The only way to attain this mental picture of good outlines is to read attentively as much good shorthand as you can. Reading and rereading these pages of good outlines fixes them in the mind. Then when the words are heard in actual dictation the shorthand outlines are readily available.

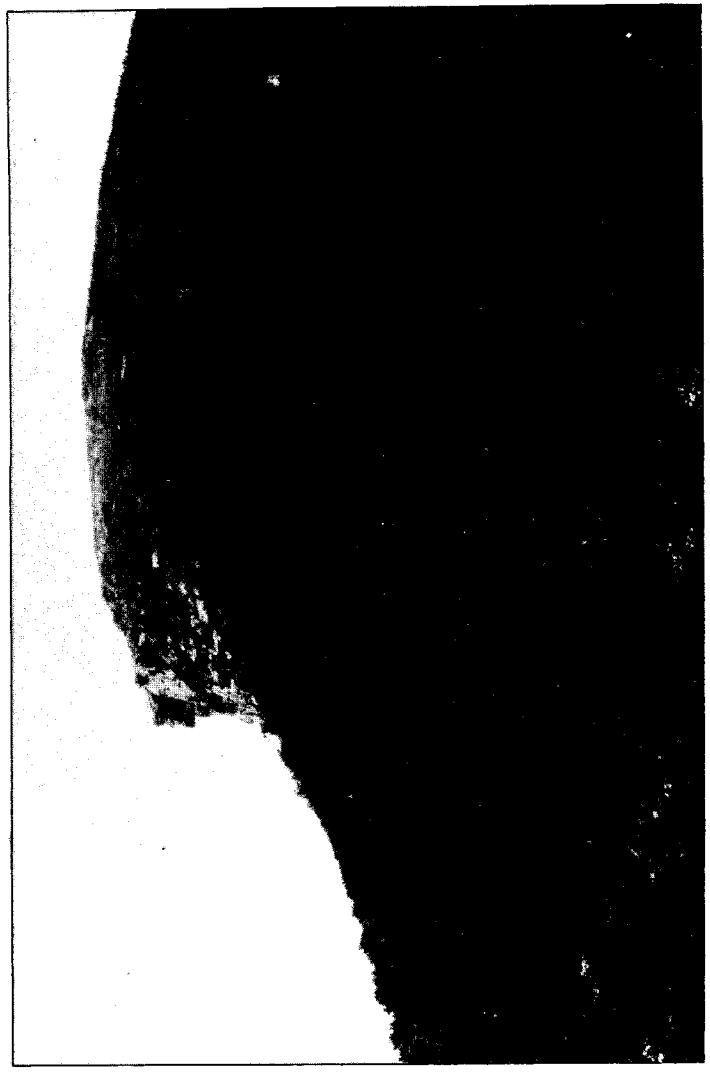
Another advantage to be obtained from this practice in reading good shorthand notes, an advantage seldom thought of, is the improvement in shorthand penmanship. To many it seems rather strange that *reading* shorthand should increase the student's skill in *writing.*

The answer to this apparent paradox is that, contrary to a commonly accepted but erroneous idea, shorthand is written not with the head but with the hand. If the mind does not know what it wishes the hand to write, it is clear the hand will be helpless. Only the constant reading of really good shorthand notes will stock the mind properly with the necessary store of shorthand pictures.

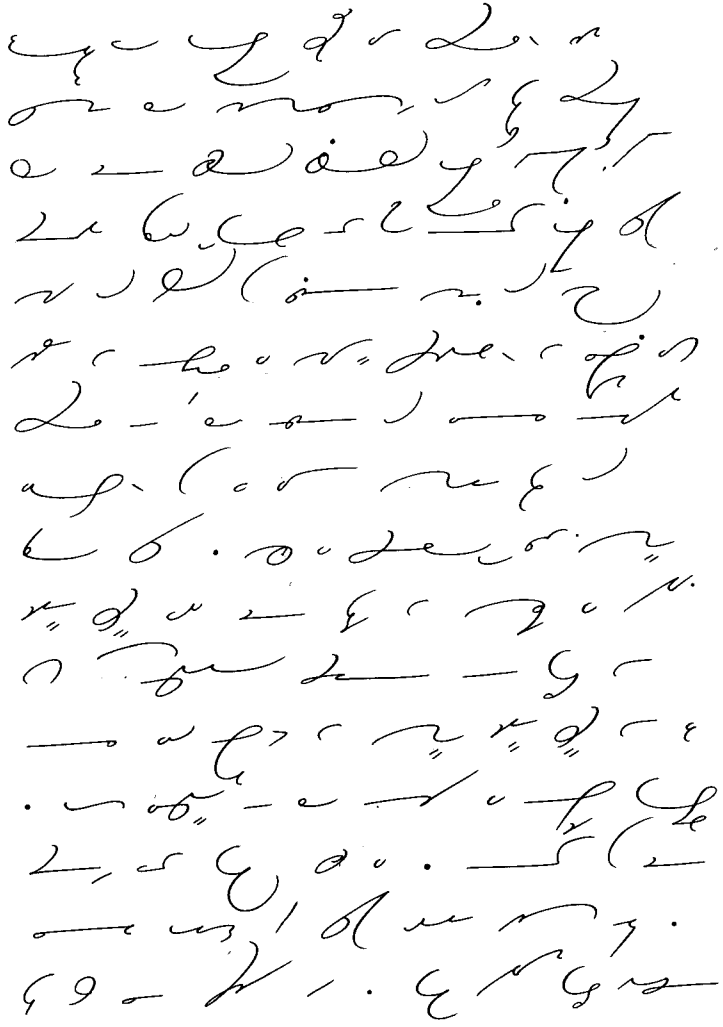
It is also true that the reading of English classics in shorthand is much more resultful than the reading of those same stories in print. When we read shorthand it is necessary to pay closer attention to the context than when reading print. Also when reading these shorthand stories it is usual to read them a number of times in order to fix the shorthand outlines in mind. The fact that the reading is repeated, combined with the fact that each time it is read more attentively, means that every phrase and turn of thought is more firmly grasped than if it were in print, hastily skimmed over once or twice.

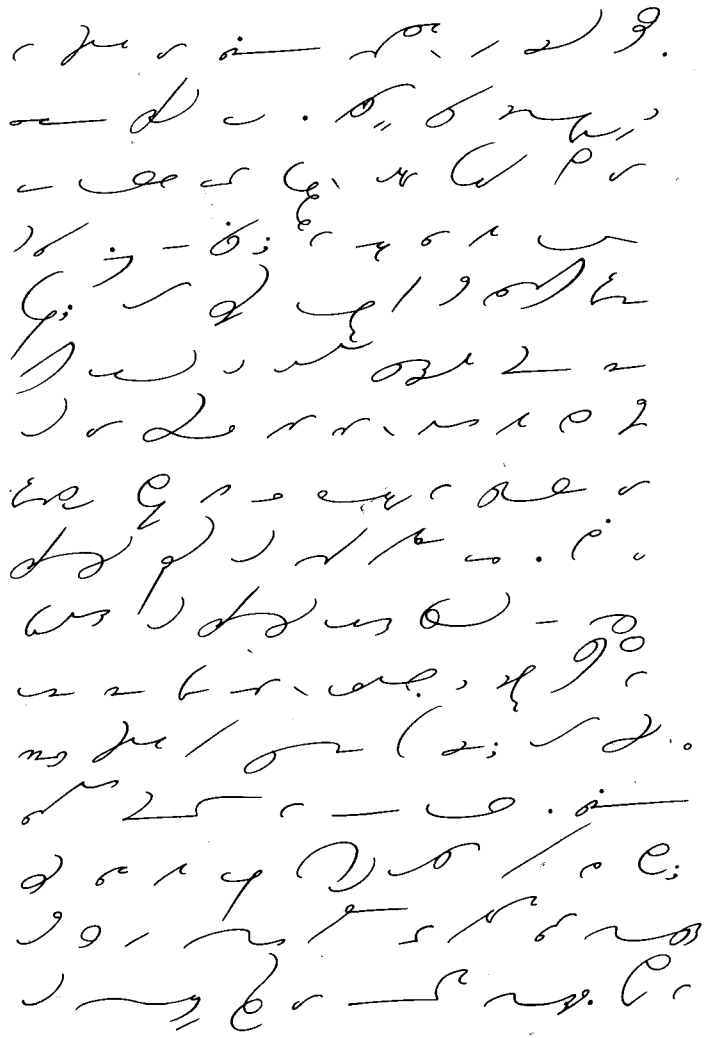
Let us remember then that in reading *The Great Stone Face* in shorthand time after time we are killing at least three birds with the one stone: (1) We are stocking our minds with shorthand outlines that will increase our speed of writing. (2) We are fixing in our minds standards of shorthand penmanship that will increase the beauty and legibility of our writing. (3) We are improving our knowledge of and our ability to use the English language—the most important working tool the shorthand writer has in his kit.

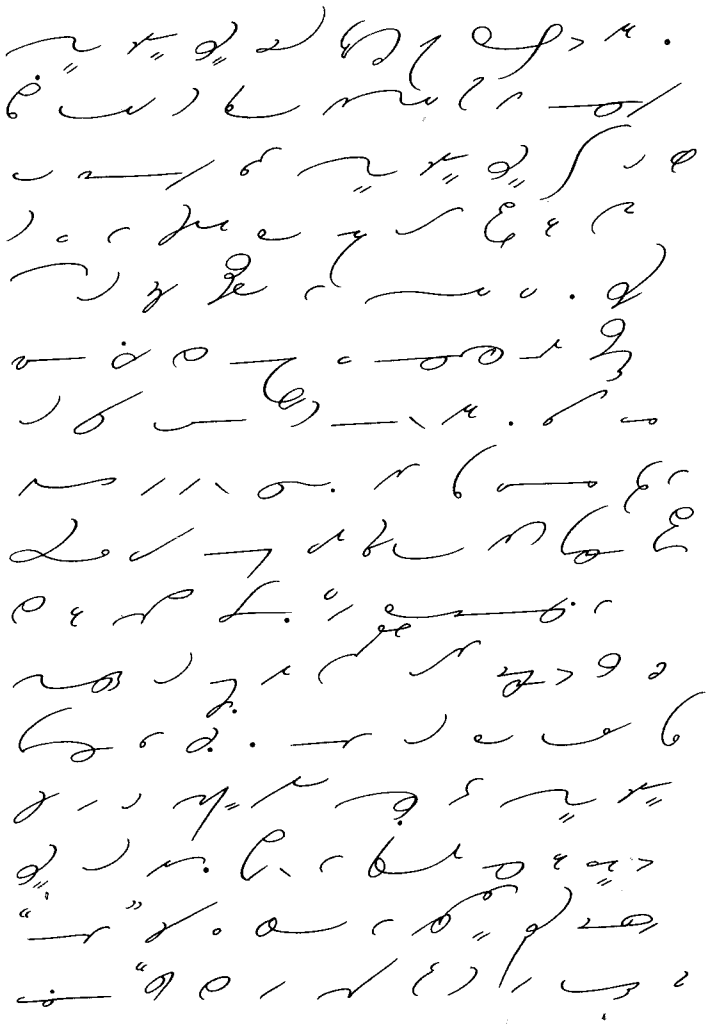
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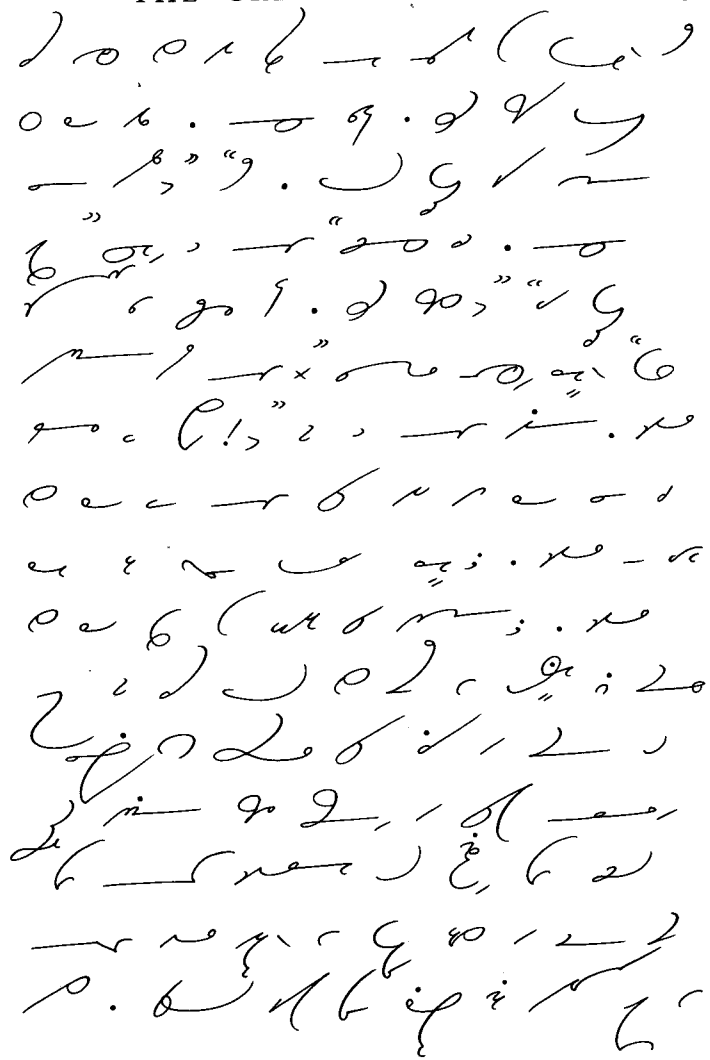


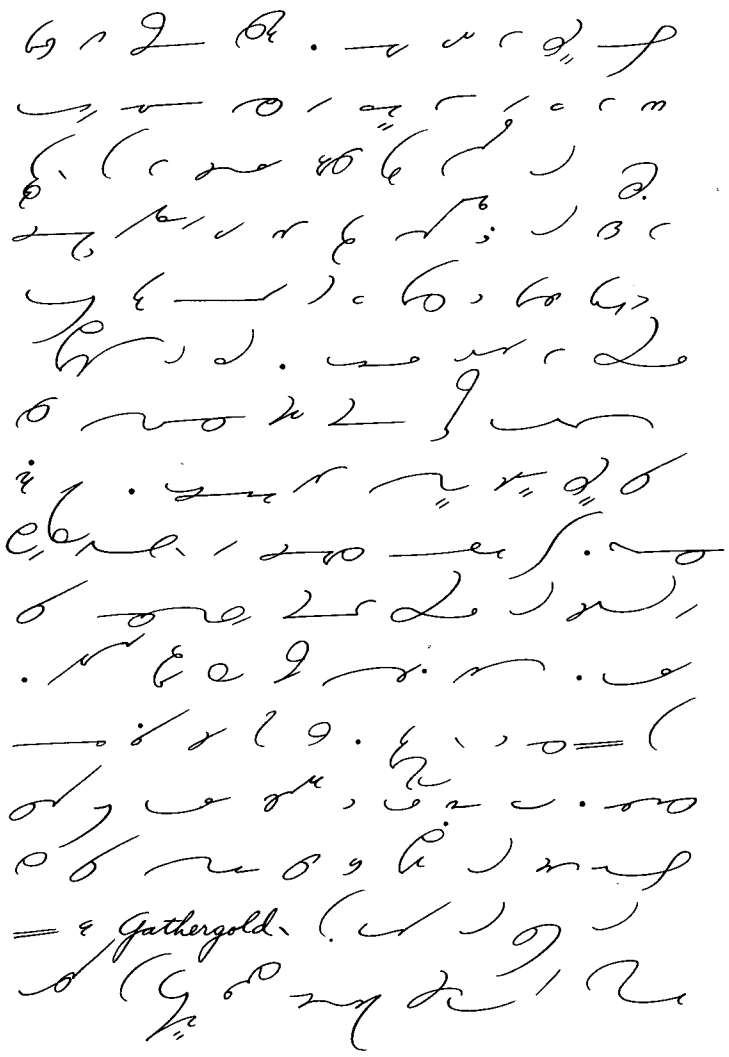
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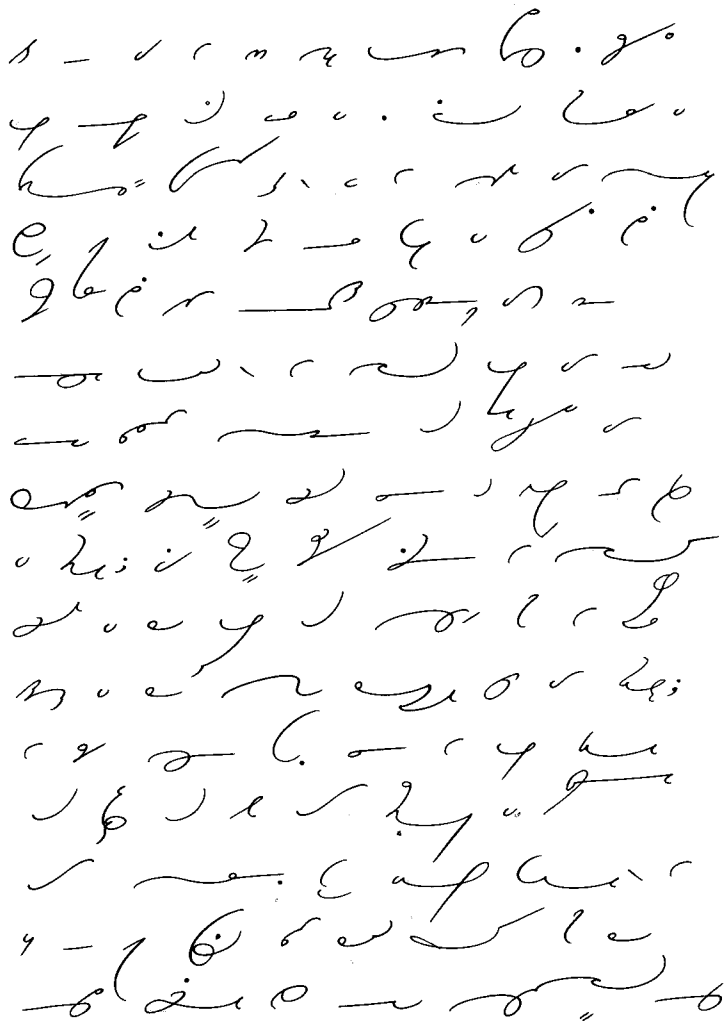


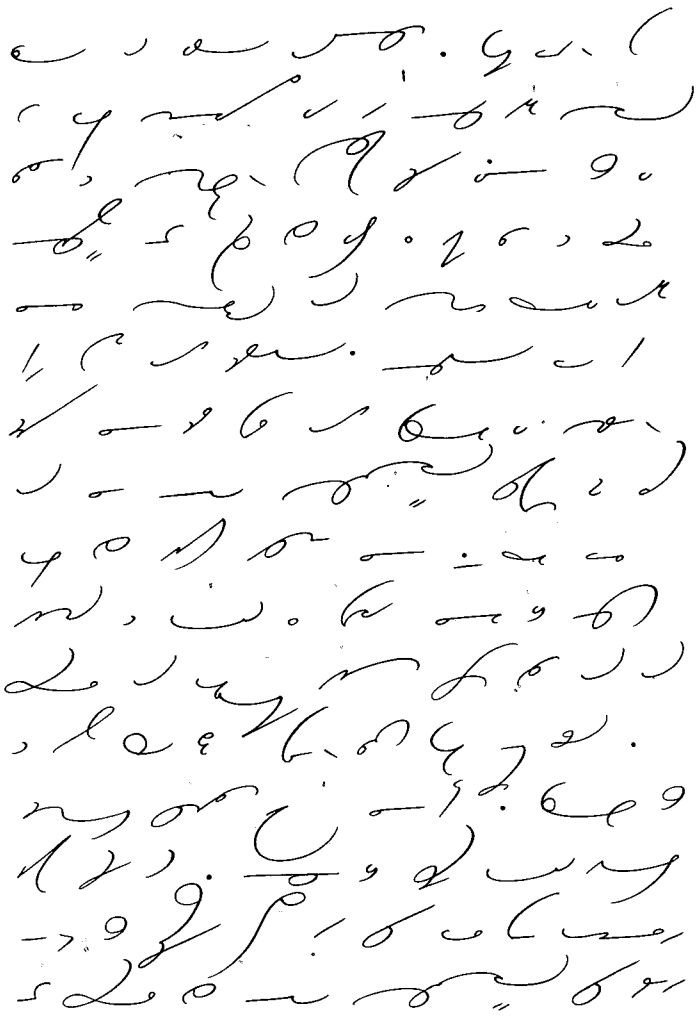


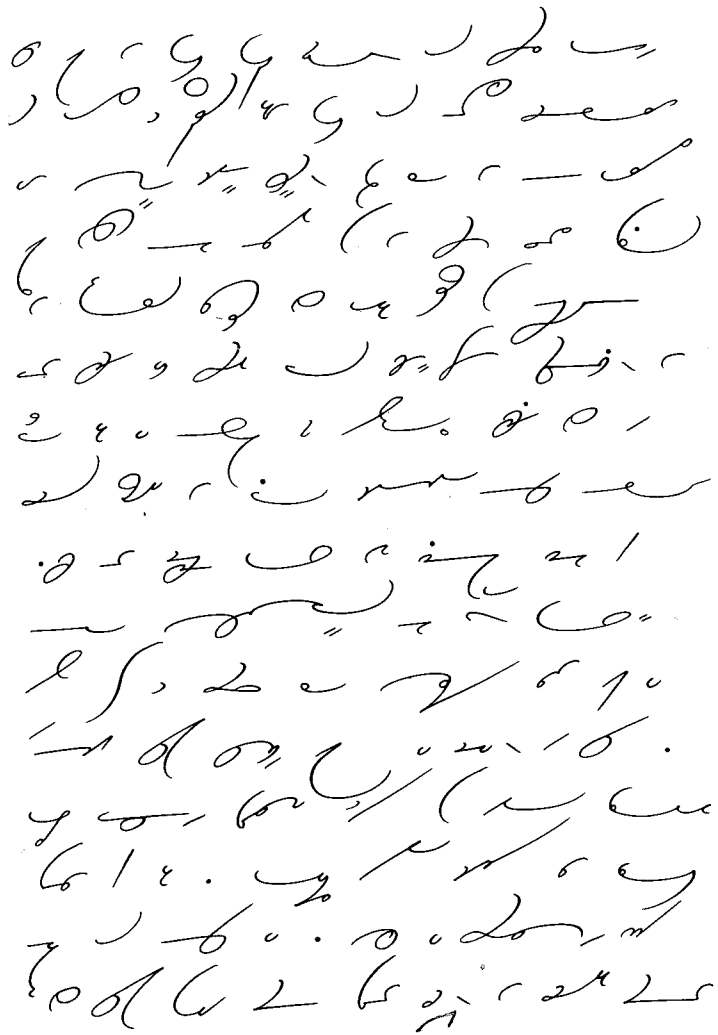


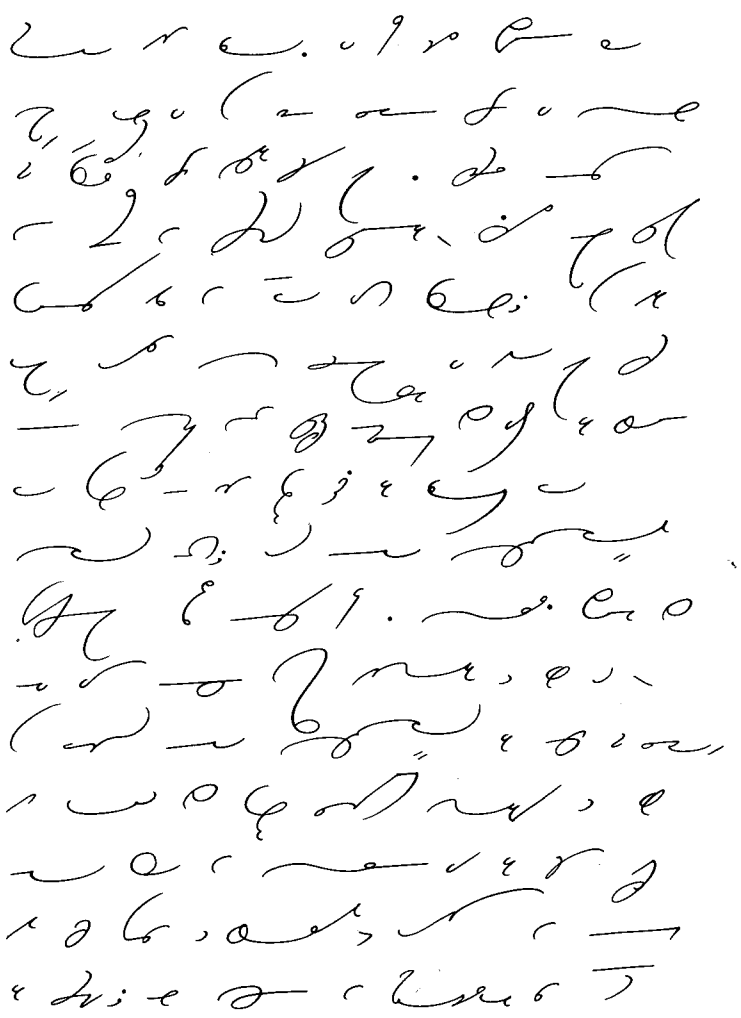


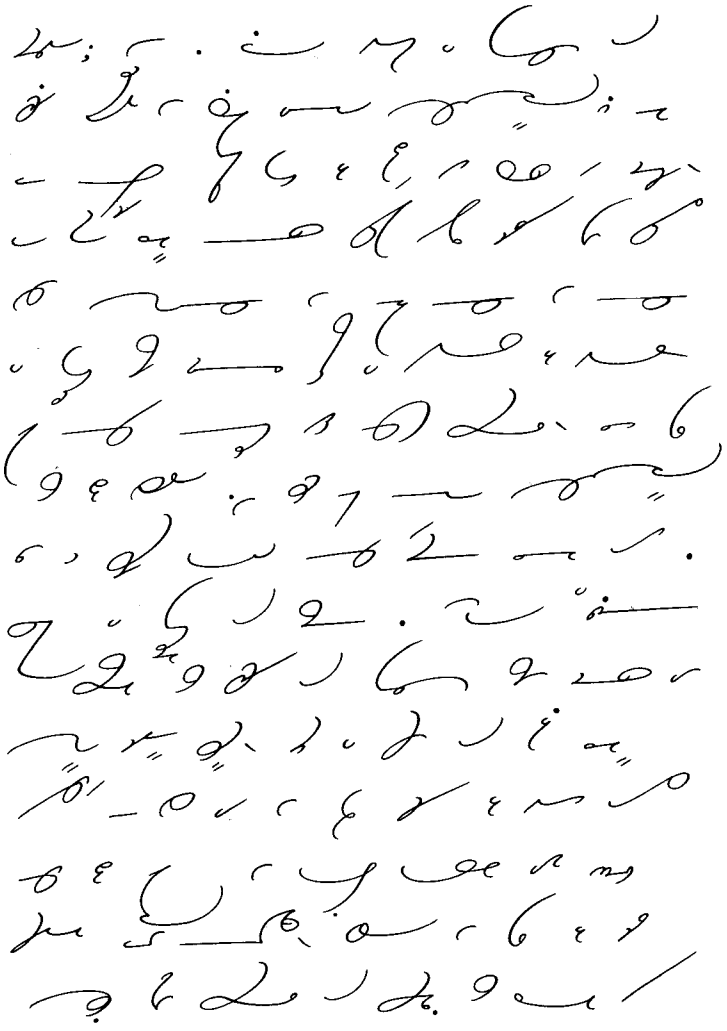


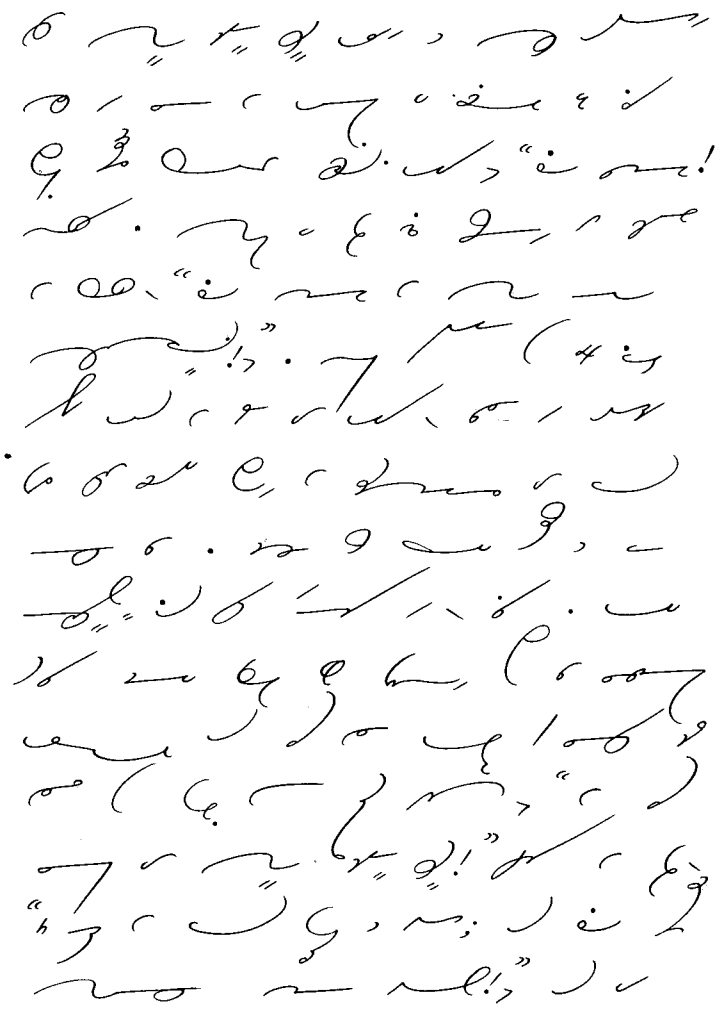


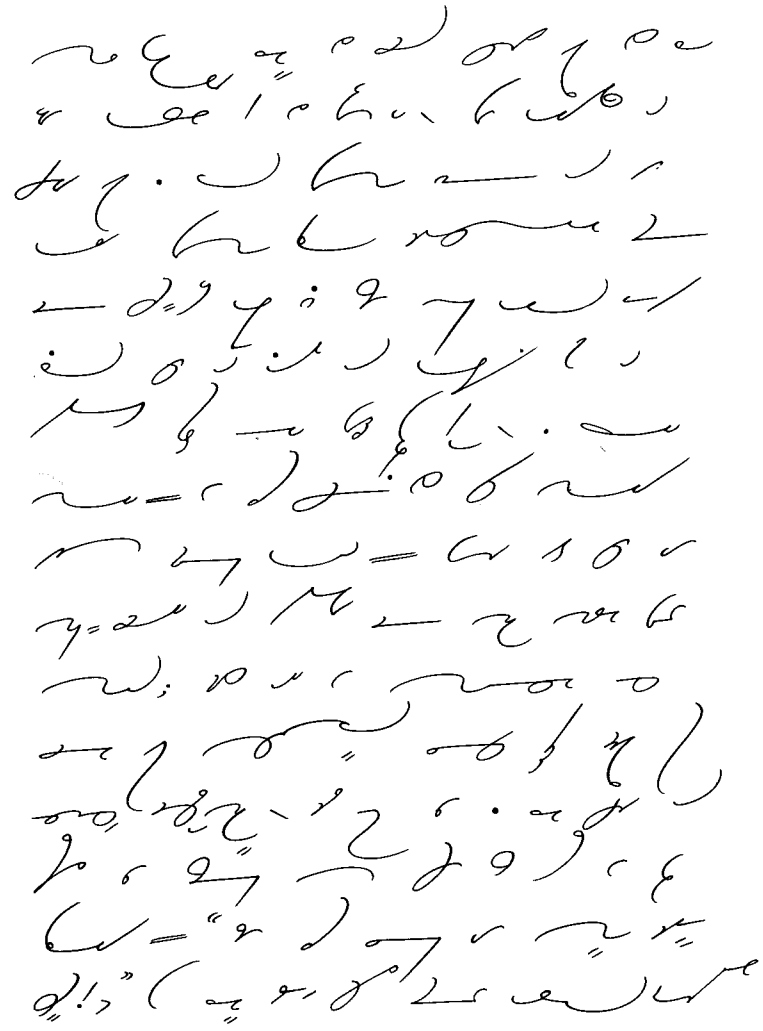


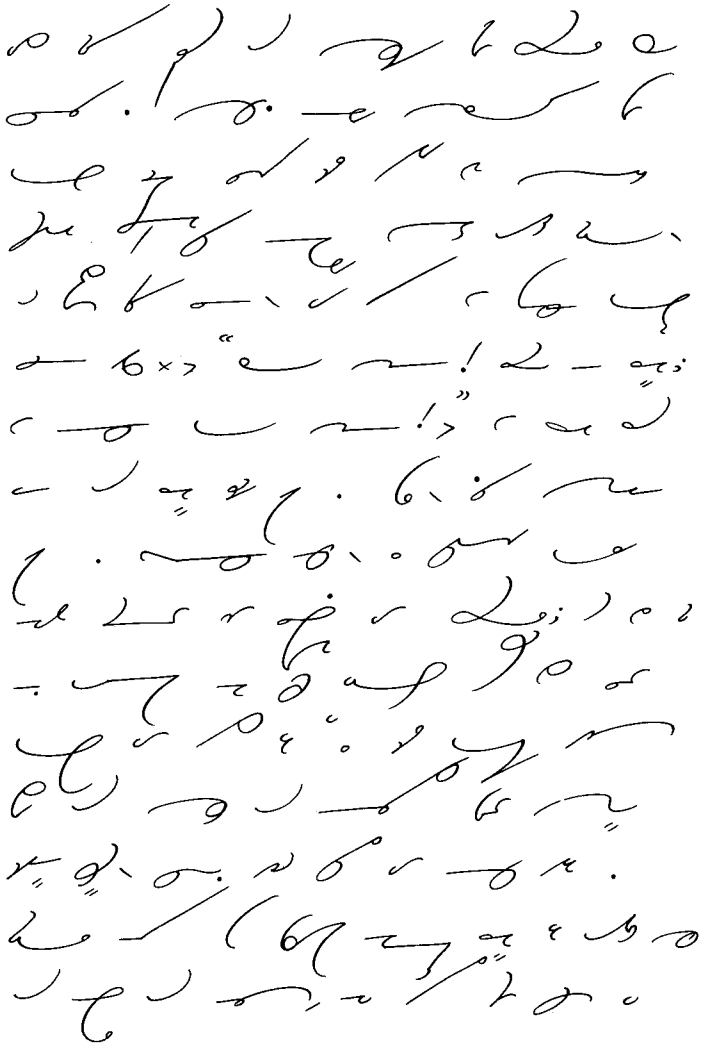


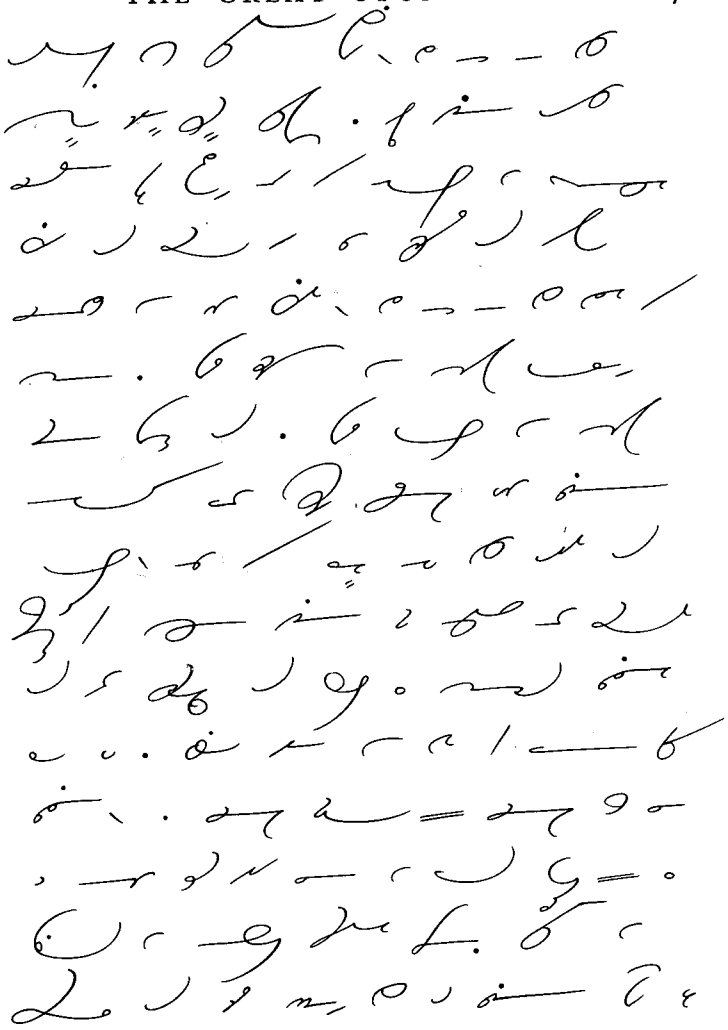


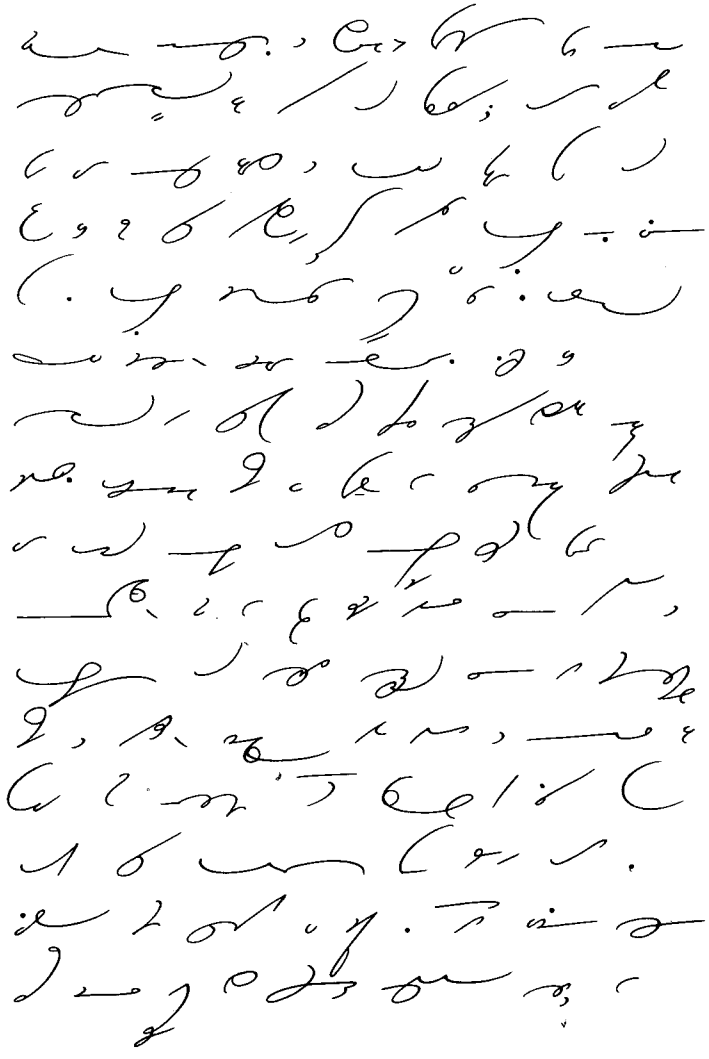


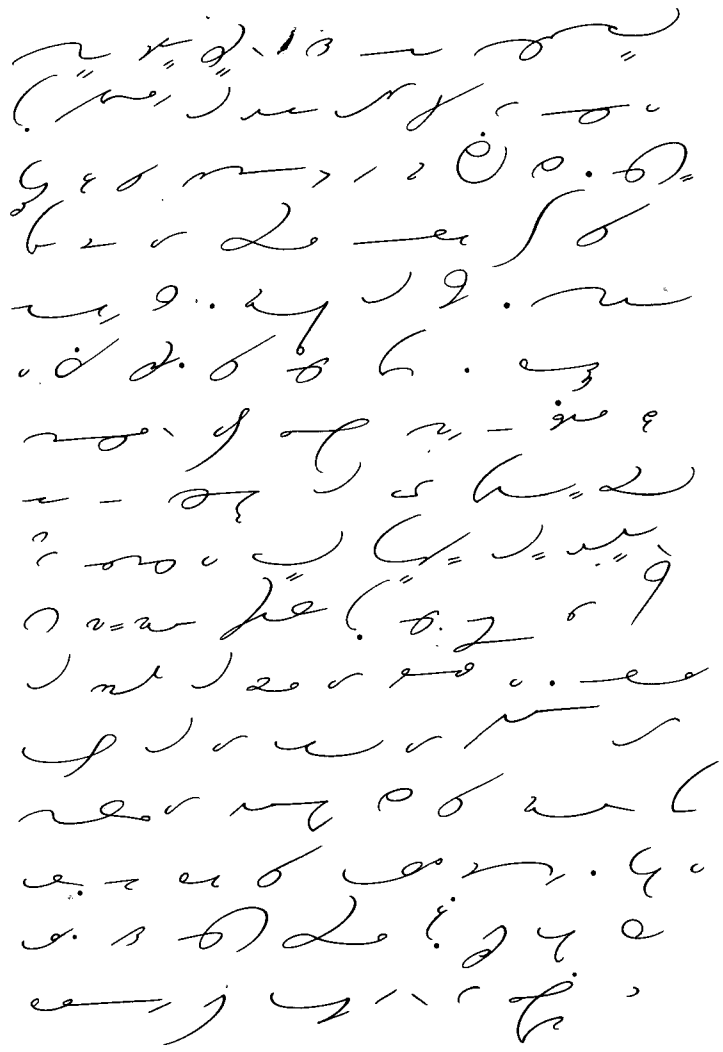


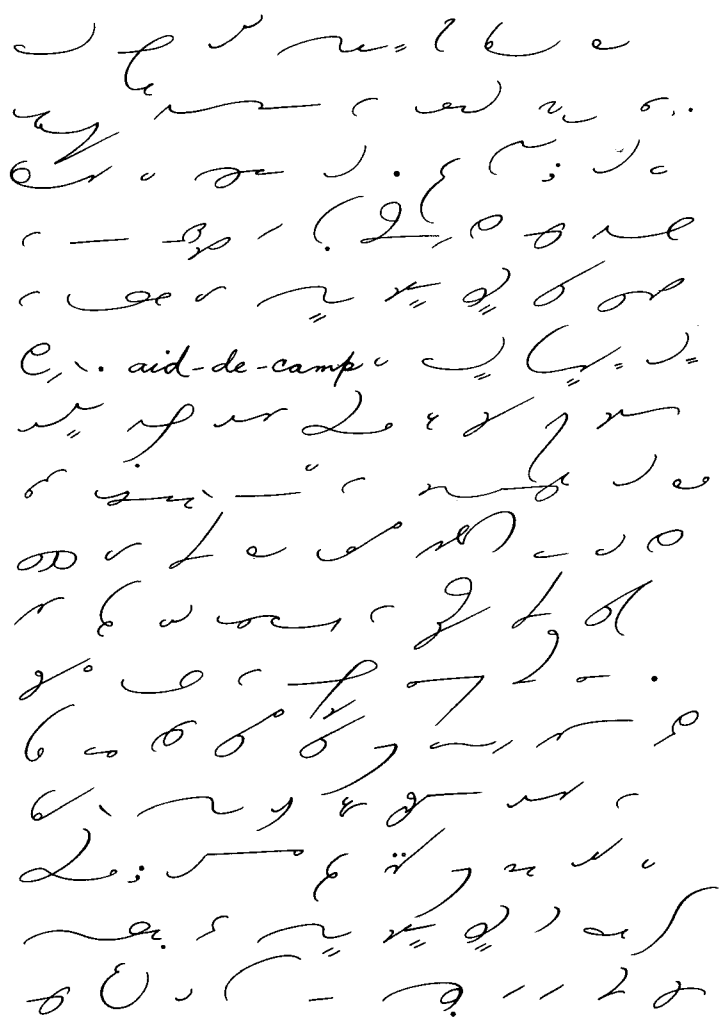


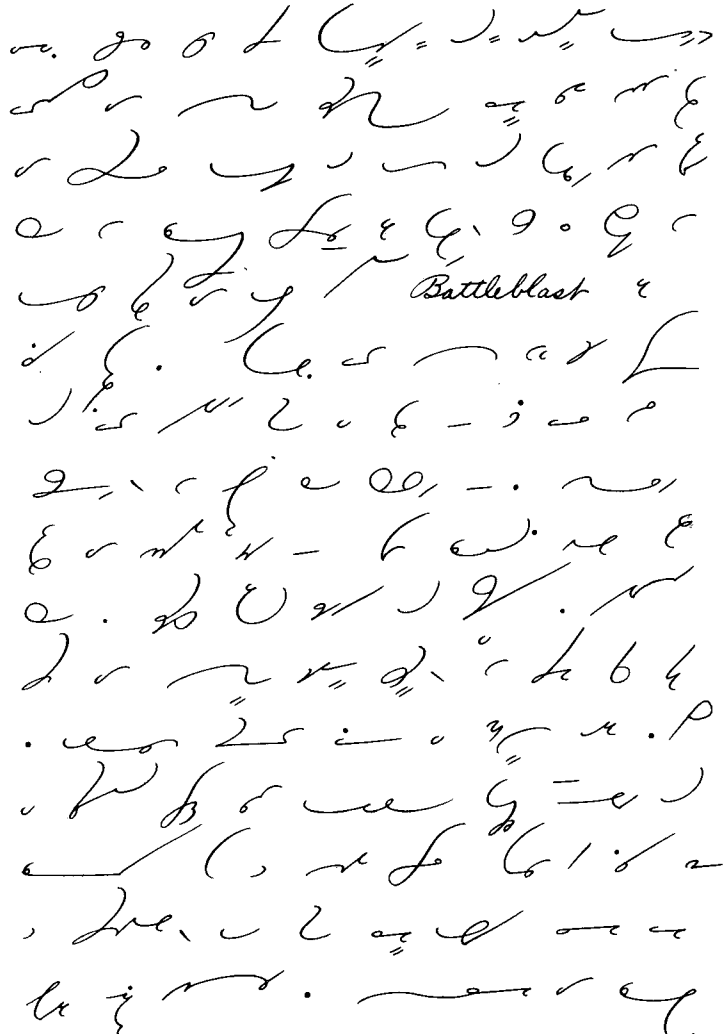









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